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Jury reforms are needed

Courts around the country, including the Michigan Supreme Court, are studying reform proposals to help jurors better understand evidence and the legal process, thus improving deliberations. Revising the jury process would also help make an important American civic duty a bit more desirable to citizens.

Many, if not most, people dread being called to jury duty, seeing it as an inconvenience as opposed to a high duty of citizenship. Some who are called to serve are concerned about the amount of time. Others worry about understanding the jargon and process itself, which oftentimes can seem to work against them when making a deliberation.

Adopting a few of the preliminary proposals from the Michigan Supreme Court would make the job of a juror far easier and more pleasant.

We must first consider increasing the pay for jurors if they are called for more than one day of duty. Under current Michigan law, jurors make less than \$10 per day of service.

For some folks, \$10 won't even fill up half a gas tank at the end of the day. And employers often stop paying their employees after a few days.

After the first day of service, jurors should be paid between \$30 and \$40.

Michigan must also allow jurors to take additional notes, including during closing arguments. That would enable jurors to look further back on the course of a case and come to their own conclusions without having to rely on case theory using only their memories. At the very least, jurors should be given a transcript or recording of the deliberation process.

Jurors should also be provided with some sort of packet upon entering deliberations, which includes relevant information, jury instruction, statutory passages applicable to the case and other information.

Doing this would cut down on questions that would be asked of judges during the deliberation process and save time spent hunting down attorneys, defendants and others, who all must be present when a question is passed from a jury foreman to the bailiff.

The Michigan Supreme Court has already published many of the proposals through their Web site at www.courts.michigan.gov/supreme-court/administrative/2003-04-2-3-04.pdf

Jury duty is a sacrifice of our time, convenience and our money, but it is an essential part of the democratic process. Therefore, finding ways to make citizens more eager to answer the call to duty is crucial.

► To the point

Reforming American jury duties would streamline the legal process and reward an important civic duty.
